and any fees required therefor (including fees for net addition of claims) are hereby authorized to be charged to our Deposit Account No. 19-0036.

Amendments

In the Claims:

Please cancel claims 48, 83 and 84 without prejudice or disclaimer.

Please substitute the following claim 45 for the pending claim 45:

45. (Four times amended) A method for enhancing the transformation ability or the viability of a bacterium, said method comprising:

(a) increasing the unsaturated fatty acid content of the membrane of said bacterium by

(i) enhancing expression of one or more genes that encode one or more gene products which increase said unsaturated fatty acid content, or

(ii) genetically selecting for a bacterium having an increased membrane unsaturated fatty acid content, and

(b) storing said bacterium at a temperature of from about +4°C to about -80°C,

wherein said bacterium, after said storing, exhibits enhanced transformation ability or enhanced viability relative to the transformation ability or viability exhibited by said bacterium prior to increasing its unsaturated fatty acid content.

Please substitute the following claim 46 for the pending claim 46:

46. (Four times amended) A method for enhancing the transformation ability or the viability of bacteria, said method comprising:

(a) increasing the unsaturated fatty acid content of the membrane of said bacteria by

(i) enhancing expression of one or more genes that encode one or more gene products which increase said unsaturated fatty acid content, or

(ii) genetically selecting for a bacterium having an increased membrane unsaturated fatty acid content, and

(b) storing said bacteria at a temperature of from about +4°C to about -80°C,

wherein said bacteria, after said storing, exhibit enhanced transformation ability or enhanced viability relative to the transformation ability or viability exhibited by said bacteria prior to increasing their unsaturated fatty acid content.

Please substitute the following claim 49 for the pending claim 49:

49. (Once amended) The method of claim 46, wherein said enhancing expression comprises increasing transcription or translation of said one or more genes.

Please substitute the following claim 50 for the pending claim 50:

50. (Twice amended) The method of claim 46, wherein said enhancing expression comprises increasing the copy number of one or more genes, wherein said one or more genes are comprised by one or more vectors.

Please substitute the following claim 56 for the pending claim 56:

56. (Once amended) The method of claim 46, wherein said one or more genes are selected from the group consisting of a *fabB* gene, a *fabF* gene, a *fabD* gene, a *fabG* gene, a *fabA* gene, a *fabI* gene, a *fabZ* gene, a *fadA* gene, a *fadB* gene, a *fadE* gene, a *fadL* gene, a *fadR* gene, a *farR* gene, and a *fatA* gene.

Please substitute the following claim 58 for the pending claim 58:

58. (Thrice amended) A method for obtaining a competent bacterium, said method comprising:

(a) increasing the unsaturated fatty acid content of the membrane of a bacterium by

(i) enhancing expression of one or more genes that encode one or more gene products which increase said unsaturated fatty acid content, or

(ii) genetically selecting for a bacterium having an increased membrane unsaturated fatty acid content; and

(b) making said bacterium competent.

Please substitute the following claim 59 for the pending claim 59:

59. (Thrice amended) A method for obtaining competent bacteria, said method comprising:

(a) increasing the unsaturated fatty acid content of the membrane of bacteria by

(i) enhancing expression of one or more genes that encode one or more gene products which increase said unsaturated fatty acid content, or

(ii) genetically selecting for bacteria having an increased membrane unsaturated fatty acid content; and

(b) making said bacteria competent.

Please substitute the following claim 62 for the pending claim 62:

62. (Thrice amended) The method of claim 59, wherein said enhancing expression comprises increasing the copy number of said one or more genes.

Please substitute the following claim 70 for the pending claim 70:

70. (Twice amended) The method of claim 47, wherein said bacteria exhibit enhanced transformation ability or enhanced viability after storage at about -20°C.

Please substitute the following claim 72 for the pending claim 72:

72. (Twice amended) A competent *E. coli* possessing a membrane having an increased unsaturated fatty acid content relative to total fatty acid content, wherein said

competent *E. coli* exhibits enhanced transformation ability relative to the transformation ability exhibited by said competent *E. coli* prior to increasing its unsaturated fatty acid content.

Please add the following claims:

85. (New) A competent *E. coli* having a membrane with an increased unsaturated fatty acid content, said increase caused by enhancing the expression of one or more genes that encode one or more gene products which increase said unsaturated fatty acid content.

86. (New) The competent *E. coli* of claim 85, wherein said enhanced expression is the result of increasing transcription or translation of said one or more genes.

87. (New) The competent *E. coli* of claim 85, wherein said enhanced expression is the result of increasing the copy number of said one or more genes.

88. (New) The competent *E. coli* of claim 85, wherein said unsaturated fatty acid is selected from the group consisting of oleic acid, linoleic acid, palmitoleic acid, and cis-vaccenic acid.

89. (New) The competent *E. coli* of claim 85, wherein said one or more genes are selected from the group consisting of a *fabB* gene, a *fabF* gene, a *fabD* gene, a *fabG* gene, a

fabA gene, a *fabI* gene, a *fabZ* gene, a *fadA* gene, a *fadB* gene, a *fadE* gene, a *fadL* gene, a *fadR* gene, a *farR* gene, and a *fatA* gene.

90. (New) The competent *E. coli* of claim 85, wherein said one or more genes is a *fabB* gene.

91. (New) A competent *E. coli* having a membrane with an increased unsaturated fatty acid content, said increase caused by genetically selecting for an increased membrane unsaturated fatty acid content.